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District of Arizona*

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MEXICAN NATIONAL FOUND GUILTY OF HOLDING ILLEGAL ALIENS HOSTAGE IN PHOENIX

PHOENIX - Jorge Avena-Pardo, 23, of Mexico, was found guilty here late yesterday by a federal jury of Hostage Taking and Conspiracy to Commit Hostage Taking; Carrying, Using, and Brandishing a Firearm During and in Relation to a Crime of Violence; and Harboring Illegal Aliens. The case was tried before U.S. District Court Judge David G. Campbell. The defendant is in custody pending sentencing set before Judge Campbell on March 6, 2006.

Paul K. Charlton, U.S. Attorney for the District of Arizona, stated that "Violence against illegal aliens is on the rise. These hijackers stole a load of illegal aliens from their coyotes, then treated the hostages as a commodity. The jury's verdict shows that this disregard for human life will not be tolerated."

"We're going to continue hunting down and apprehending those criminals who try to profit through intimidation and brutality," said Roberto G. Medina, Special Agent-in-Charge of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Office of Investigations in Arizona. "We're sending the message that hard time is all you'll get if you commit these acts in our communities."

The evidence at trial showed that the defendant and other co-conspirators highjacked at gunpoint a truck containing 17 illegal aliens in late July 2004. The aliens were held captive in a house in Phoenix and threatened to extract ransom from their families.

The captives were rescued from the house after two of them escaped on July 23, 2004 and contacted Phoenix Police, who surrounded the house and ordered the occupants out. Avena - Pardo was not apprehended at the house but was located after an extensive investigation by ICE agents with assistance by the Glendale Police Department.

A conviction for Hostage Taking and for Carrying, Using, or Brandishing a Firearm, During and In Relation to a Crime of Violence each carries a maximum penalty of life in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both. A conviction for Harboring Illegal Aliens carries a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Campbell will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by ICE with assistance from the Glendale and Phoenix Police Departments. The prosecution is being handled by Emory T. Hurley, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

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